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ABSTRACT

This proposal for the restructuring of teaching and learning in the Dundee College of Education (Scotland) evolved from a perceived need to identify and bridge any gap between education and society. The establishment of four Academic Councils was proposed to examine the following areas: (1) the management of learning and teaching from the unique resource facilities of the college; (2) the examination, and, when necessary, the revision of all courses to ensure their relevance to social, academic, and practical needs; (3) the establishment, where desirable, of relationships between departments which would assist fulfillment of the objectives of the college and simplify some administrative processes; and (4) the review of assessment techniques to harmonize with other changes. This structure has materialized and is now functioning. The four Academic Councils are responsible for studying, evaluating, and making recommendations on: learning management systems; course planning teams; departmental confederations; and academic assessment. A description is given of the progress of this proposal, its strengths and weaknesses are examined, and views are offered on the feasibility and desirability of interdepartmental cooperation in a four-year college program. (JD)

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MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS PAPER

FOR

THE NEW QUADRIVIUM

A proposal for the restructuring
of teaching and learning in
Dundee College of Education

Dundee College of Education

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1. Background

a. The educational issues upon which the New Quadrivium proposals are based are,

(i) the structuring of the College through effective Departmental groupings to enable collaborative organisation of courses and teaching and learning to be carried out to best advantage. (It was originally proposed that there would be four such groupings, to be designated faculties, hence the term, "The New Quadrivium".)

(ii) the mismatch between the concept of individualised learning on which the new College (opened 1975) was based, and its present organisational structure, which may be seen in its traditional time-tabling as frustrating realisation of the College potential.

(iii) a concentration within courses on the needs of students, teachers and pupils in present-day society, rather than on the conservation of subject content for its own sake.

The importance of the proposals for the training of teachers in Scotland at this time is reflected in an increasing awareness on a wider front of the need to identify and bridge any gap between education and society.

b. The proposal for the re-structuring of teaching and learning in Dundee College of Education to tackle the issues raised above has the following major elements,

(i) the establishment of a College Council capable of investigating and reporting on major issues of critical importance to course design and management.

(ii) the identification of the most crucial areas for investigation and subsequent recommendations.

(iii) the establishment of four Academic Councils to examine the following areas,

- the management of learning and teaching to obtain the maximum return from the unique resource facilities of the College.
- the examination, and, where necessary, the revision of all College courses to ensure their relevance to societal, academic and practical needs.
- the establishment, where desirable, of relationships between Departments which would assist fulfilment of the objectives of the College and simplify some administrative processes.
- the review of assessment techniques to harmonise with other changes.

The time-tables initially envisaged within the proposals (first submitted in May, 1980) looked for a detailed plan for restructuring to be produced within 12 months. Implementation might commence after that period of time and extend over two or three years.

c. The original proposals were put by the Principal of Dundee College of Education to the Executive Committee of the College (the effective decision making group, representative of all staff and students), in May, 1980, although earlier, individual views were expressed to the Higher Academic staff by some Principal lecturers, and earlier Occasional Papers had been presented to "set the scene".

The proposals aroused considerable interest within the Executive Committee and at all levels of academic staff and a number of concerns were expressed. However, the adoption of the general proposals was made at Executive Committee level with the specific requirement that immediate departmental discussions of the outline take place.

The implementation of the proposals therefore was to be from the

higher levels of academic administration down through various Councils to Departments and individual lecturers.

d. The structure envisaged in the initial proposals has materialised and is functioning. There are five senior members of academic staff as the College Council and the four Academic Councils are constituted thus,

A. Learning Management Systems Academic Council

B. Course Planning Teams Academic Council

C. Departmental Confederations Academic Council

D. Assessment Academic Council.

Each comprises the five members of College Council plus four members of staff elected by the Executive Committee.

Every remaining member of staff was invited to make submissions, either individually or through Departments, to any of these Academic Councils. A comprehensive range of papers was received. In addition, nominated members of staff were asked to address specific Academic Councils on specialised topics.

The recommendations of the Academic Councils have been considered by the College Council who in turn made precise proposals to the College Executive Committee. Agreement at this level will allow implementation across the College as a whole.

e. No additional funds have been made available to the College as a whole, from its funding body (the Scottish Education Department). All the consideration of proposals, the preparation of detailed plans and the experimentation with implementation is therefore borne within the current expenditure. Any longer term effects on spending (for example by a different deployment of staff) have yet to be analysed and investigated.

f. Internal evaluation is largely in the hands of the College Council

aided by the Assessment Academic Council, the latter having already made a survey of some current practices. Further evaluation will depend on the accurate documentation of change as the project develops, and on the role of the College Council in overseeing the global implementation of the proposals.

The appointment of an external evaluator has yet to be fully discussed, although there is a general impression that this should be done.

2. Change Analysis

a. The proposals were put forward at a time when there was a large measure of insecurity within the Scottish Colleges of Education System. It was widely held at Central Government level that there existed an excess of places in the colleges for the training of teachers, with a consequent staff complement additional to requirements. This resulted in staff redundancies and threatened Dundee College closure. Although this latter threat has now receded, there has been a reduction in staff numbers from about 140 to 95 by means of "voluntary redundancy". However there was still a strong feeling existing that the proposed restructuring posed yet another threat to the security of individual members of staff. The way in which this feeling manifested itself was an opposition to specific parts of the proposal. Thus the possible introduction of a Faculty structure with attendant Deans of Faculties was seen by some people as an alternative to the existing Department structure and such an alternative was viewed as a further threat to the security of staff posts.

As a means of overcoming this opposition, two strategies were adopted. First, the Principal of the College addressed the academic staff to explain the proposals and their implications for a more secure future rather than a more threatened one. Additionally the

Principal offered to discuss with individual Departments or groups of Departments any specific concerns still held. In the end only two of the 21 Departments took this opportunity.

A further feeling amongst staff was indicated in their strong desire to be involved at the highest possible levels of decision making. This was obvious by the clear demand that the elected members of the four Academic Councils be on the basis of open nomination and secret ballot - despite a prior recommendation from the College Council regarding possible Academic Council membership. Although the nomination and ballot procedure meant a time-lag in the establishment of the Academic Councils, it was deemed necessary to allow such a procedure to take place. It is interesting to note that the elected members at the end of this process were exactly the same as those initially recommended by the College Council.

b. Since the start of the project no unforeseen events or forces have yet developed to hinder the achievement of the goals. It is, however, only nine months since the first proposals were announced. If anything, the only possible drawback has been a widening of interests of the various Academic Councils as a result of the large numbers of submissions, papers and reports brought forward by members of staff. This has meant that the amount of work (preparation for meetings, analysis of documents, discussions with colleagues) has truly been very heavy.

One aspect of this work-load is reflected in the need to keep track of all the papers submitted to and resulting from Council meetings. A clear and simple labelling has been established together with a "stock" set of all such papers which any member of staff may consult.

c. After nine months, the progress made has probably exceeded earlier expectations. No fewer than twelve fundamental recommendations have been passed through the College Executive Committee, as a result of

which the following changes have been implemented:-

(i) a Planning Team has been set up (on a trial basis) to examine from first principles, all Teacher Training Courses offered by the College in Primary School Education.

(ii) an experimental common approach to the assessment of teaching practice has been undertaken by Departments.

It appears that the momentum gained by the project has not been lost and that, despite a very heavy involvement for some members of staff, the ground being covered and the progress being made is considerable. In some measure this has been due to the members of the College Council allocating part of the week, every week, as "Council time", and the general rating of Council work as high priority.

Additionally, a draft document entitled "The Way Forward" has been circulated to every member of staff. This paper includes all the proposals and recommendations referred to above and sets them out in an overall new College policy.

A summary of the forces operating on the project is as follows.

In favour:

(a) There has been full support from the Principal throughout all the negotiations and discussions.

(b) The dynamic leadership of the College Council by the Vice-Principal and his tireless efforts to maintain progress is widely recognised.

(c) Many members of staff realise that an absence of change might jeopardise the future existence of the College.

(d) There is the challenge of a fresh untrammelled approach to Course planning and pedagogic thinking.

(e) Recent College developments in independent and individual learning systems have given members of staff

relevant experience in working this mode.

(f) A measure of experience in inter-departmental activities has been gained through recent "distance learning" courses.

(g) There is extensive technical support and study facilities available to aid inter-disciplinary activities.

(h) There has recently been little staff turnover (mainly due to a cutback in the expansion of educational services) so that continuity of practice and planning is maintained.

(i) The possibility for all training courses to become Degree Courses is under active investigation.

(j) The interest in cross-discipline collaboration is becoming increasingly obvious across a wider front of educational thinking.

In opposition:

(a) There is an inherent "traditionalism" in Scottish educational thinking.

(b) Some staff are antagonistic or indifferent to the proposed changes in the structure.

(c) There is a minority belief that the College is too small to have a new Course structure on top of an existing Departmental structure.

(d) There is opposition to the effective change of pedagogic decision making from Heads of Department to Planning Team Directors.

(e) There are fears that certain aspects of teaching within Courses cannot be fitted into an integrated course structure.

(f) There is a degree of "institutional inertia" whereby the system tends to retain its current status and structure.

(g) The general contraction in educational resources (including staff) does not encourage innovation.

(h) The size and extent of the proposed innovation is itself unsettling.

(i) Staff insecurity remains over future possible college closures.

(j) For many there is a "fear" of thinking creatively and flexibly as opposed to the "security" of what is known and tried.

3. Strategy Design

It is always difficult to maintain a steady rate of progress, particularly with competing demands on individuals' time. However no marked "slowing down" has been noted over the past nine months. In fact the early progress (possibly greater than was anticipated) has served to maintain a high level of commitment from those most closely involved in the discussions. As indicated in 1b. above, a detailed plan was envisaged within twelve months of the first submission of the proposals. As noted in 2c. the draft paper entitled "The Way Forward" embodies all the recommendations within a policy framework. It may therefore be claimed that progress is in advance of expectations.

There is, however, still work to be done both in getting the policy document accepted by all members of staff and by the Executive Committee and in working out the details of what it entails.

The experience of the Primary Educational Planning Team (established on a trial basis) must be taken into account in establishing Planning

Teams in other areas. The problems met and overcome by the trial Planning Team have been largely new in that they have often not been faced up to previously. The additional stresses facing a Secondary Education Planning Team include the prospect of more firmly held "departmental" views. In view of the perceived importance of the Director of a Planning Team, it will be vital to appoint someone who is not seen as holding an allegiance to any single subject or subject area.

With respect to Departmental Groupings referred to under 1a.(i) it will be necessary to take account of widely differing views about

- the way in which Departments will work together.
- how many Departments can expect to work collaboratively.
- the range of different groupings to meet specific course needs.

Thus groupings may be seen as "loose confederations" rather than as Faculties as was initially envisaged, and these confederations may alter as the course needs vary.

Other Courses offered by Dundee College, namely those in Community Education and Social Work should be included in every aspect of the new policy. Furthermore there is a growing feeling that the extent of integration should include common Course elements with student teachers' training. This may ultimately lead to a common course being offered, at elementary level, to every student entering the College, leaving the choice of final qualification to a later stage (rather than prior to entry as at present). Although there probably exists sufficient goodwill in this College to encourage such a move, the controlling factors outside (Central Government) are likely to be more restricting.

An initial strategy to explore some of these difficulties is to encourage an open discussion amongst staff at all levels. This will

include non-academic support staff as well as academic staff. It is not anticipated, at this stage, that there will be any directive given from top management, although it is recognised that differences of opinion and views will still exist. Any resolution of these, if not possible by consultation, must finally be made at the level of the College Executive Committee.

James M Ewing.